



Honoring Our Nation's Veterans

Our nation's veterans selflessly stood in harm's way as the guardians of our most fundamental freedoms - life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Congress has worked hard with our Commander-in-Chief to support the values and principles our veterans share. Republicans will continue to proudly stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our nation's veterans and their families by delivering on our responsibilities now and in the future.

Congress Has...

Provided Record Funding for Veteran Programs

- The FY 2004 budget (passed the House April 2003) calls for a 10.7% increase in veterans funding - providing a record \$63.8 billion for programs.
- On healthcare alone, our budget provides nearly \$30 billion - an increase of 12.9% over last year.
- The Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act (Passed the House May 2003) increases disability compensation rates to veterans with service-connected disabilities as well as dependency and indemnity compensation rates for survivors of certain service-connected disabilities.

Improved Job Training, Education and Placement

- Finding a job and establishing economic independence and security can be difficult for veterans and their families as they transition from active duty to civilian status.
- The Jobs for Veterans Act (signed November 2002) reformed veterans' job training and placement programs through a new system of incentives and accountability measures aimed at providing more economic security.

Enhanced Survivor Benefits

- Veterans are not the only ones who have sacrificed for our nation's freedom. The families of those who have served in America's armed forces have sacrificed as well.
- The Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvements Act (signed June 2001) adds \$100 million in new health care benefits for surviving spouses and extends life insurance coverage to spouses and children to help these families in their time of need.
- The plan also increases the amount of educational assistance for survivors and dependents, as well as the rates of veterans' basic educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill.
- The Armed Forces Tax Fairness Act (Passed the House April 2003) provides tax-free treatment of death gratuity benefits given to survivors of members of the military.
- The plan also provides tax-free treatment of dependent care benefits.
- The National Defense Authorization Act of 2004 (Passed in the House May 2003) instructs the Secretary of Defense to review the Survivor Benefit Program (SBP) procedures in order to ensure equitable treatment for the survivors of all men and women who served, regardless of circumstances surrounding their death.

Provided More Uniform, High Quality Healthcare

- Health security is a quality of life concern for our veterans and their families.
- The National Defense Authorization Act (Passed by the House May of 2003) instructs the Secretary of Defense to establish an outreach program to assist TRICARE beneficiaries in obtaining better access to health care—understanding the specifics of the coverage, obtaining more provider information and gaining more assistance in resolving any difficulties with the program that they may encounter.
- The Veterans Health Care Cost Recovery Act (Passed by the House May 2003) provides greater efficiency for Veteran Affairs' (VA) to recover costs associated with expenses for care provided to covered beneficiaries.
- The Veterans Benefits & Health Care Improvement Act (signed November 2000) ensures quality medical staff through competitive compensation for VA nurses.
- In addition, The Veterans Millennium Health Care & Benefits Act (signed November 1999) improves the health security by increasing access to geriatric evaluation, nursing home care and adult day healthcare.
- This plan also extends priority access to long-term care to severely disabled veterans and those needing care for service-connected conditions.
- Lastly, this improvement extends compensation to surviving spouses of totally disabled former prisoners-of-war.

Assisted Transitions from Active Duty to Civilian Status

- The Veterans Education & Benefits Expansion Act (signed December 2001) expands outreach to veterans during the critical transition period from active duty to civilian status in order to improve their quality of life. These benefits include an extension of preparation counseling before discharge and retirement.
- This plan also improves access to VA services and benefits, such as housing, burial and disability.
- Lastly, the package includes a 46% increase in Montgomery GI Bill education and training benefits.
- The National Defense Authorization Act of 2004 (Passed the House May 2003) provides reimbursement lodging expenses for reservists and recalled retirees while serving on active duty.

Enhanced Overall Quality of Life

- The Homeless Veterans Law (signed December 2001) authorizes \$1 billion to help homeless and low-income veterans by providing housing vouchers over a period of four years.
- The plan also provides assistance to help veterans undergoing treatment for mental illness and substance abuse.
- The Armed Forces Tax Fairness Act (Passed by the House April 2003) exempts military and Foreign Service personnel from the 2 year residence requirement for capital gain exclusions on home sales. This provision allows military families to exclude up to \$250,000 (\$500,000 for married couples) of gain from the sale of a home even if they were not able to reside in the home for two of the five years preceding the sale because of a service transfer.
- The plan also allows members of the armed forces to keep their Homeowners' Assistance Program or "HAP" payments, resulting from military base closures or realignments, tax-free.
- The Veterans' Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act (Passed by Senate and House May 2003) creates a new Federal offense for the destruction of any structure, plaque, statue, or other monument on public property commemorating the service of any person(s) in the armed forces.
- The Service Members' Civil Relief Act (Passed by the House May 2003) strengthens the rights and protections to military servicemen and women such as new eviction protections, better protections against lapses in life insurance, and expansions to professional liability protections.

Reduced Burdensome Paperwork

- Veterans should not miss out on benefits simply because of filing complexities and paperwork burdens.
- The Veterans Claims Assistance Act (signed November 2000) creates a more user-friendly VA process and helps veterans prepare their claims as they seek their rightful benefits.